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Following is a summary of last month's major developments in
Northern Greece:

EU ELECTIONS: GOVERNING ND LOSES GROUND TO FAR RIGHT IN NORTH

¶1. (SBU) In the June Euro-parliament elections, the governing center-right New Democracy party suffered its biggest losses ever in the traditional stronghold of northern Greece, declining by more than 10% since the last Euro-elections of 2004. Commentators attributed the result to rising popularity of far right LAOS and nationalist "Pan-Hellenic Macedonian Front", especially among disenchanted conservative voters. These parties enjoyed their highest percentages of the vote in Thessaloniki, with 9.82% and 4.5% respectively. ND scored poorly in Thrace as well, apparently paying the price for the direct linkage of the Vatopedi monastery scandal to the area (Vistonida lake, central to the affair, is in Thrace) (Ref A).

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION IN NORTHERN GREECE INCREASES, LOCALS REACT TO PLANS FOR SHELTERS IN THE REGION

¶2. (U) On June 21, local media reported that according to Thessaloniki police, there are around 5,000 illegal immigrants, including "bogus asylum seekers" living in Thessaloniki, mostly from Albania, former Republics of the USSR and Africa. Police report an increase of illegal immigrants' arrests of 30% for the first half of 2009. Also, Thessaloniki police arrested 99 smugglers over the same period. During June, in different incidents across Macedonia and Thrace, police arrested a total of 114 illegal immigrants, including 10 minors from Iraq, and 15 smugglers, including a former police officer from Greece. GoG announced last month it was planning to establish shelters for illegal immigrants in Northern Greece. Among the locations the local press mentioned, are the former facilities of the Voice of America in the towns of Kavala and Xanthi. The news provoked strong reactions from local media and citizens, some of whom criticized the government for allegedly dumping problems on northern Greece and destabilizing Thrace by increasing the number of Muslims in the area.

NORTHERN GREEK BUSINESSES SERIOUSLY HURT BY FINANCIAL CRISIS

¶3. (U) On June 24, the Federation of Industries of Northern Greece announced the results of a poll among 197 of its members, concluding that 83% of those asked, feel that the operations and results of their businesses have been affected negatively by the current climate. Businesses complained of reduced sales and profits, and serious liquidity problems. More than 50% of the respondents have had to lay off personnel. Endangered industries include textiles, fishing and fruit processing.

TRAFFICKING: GREECE-ALBANIA CONFERENCE ON FIGHTING CHILD
TRAFFICKING

¶4. (U) On June 15-16, the Greek MFA and Ministry of Health, the local NGO "Arsis" and the OSCE Presence in Albania organized a conference against child trafficking in the city of Thessaloniki. The initiative followed the ratification by both Parliaments of a bilateral agreement on the issue between the two countries and was attended by government authorities and NGOs from Greece and Albania. The organizers told post of their intention to follow up with a conference in the fall in Albania. Also, on June 19, local media reported that the Bulgarian authorities arrested three Bulgarians for operating an infant trafficking ring, whereby they sold newborns to couples from Northern Greece. In another incident, on June 24, police arrested two Bulgarians in Thessaloniki for apparently trafficking a Bulgarian mother and her two minor children.

ARSON ATTACKS IN NORTHERN GREECE

¶5. (SBU) On June 1, unknown culprits torched two vans belonging to the national TV station "ALPHA". On June 03, an improvised incendiary device exploded at the entrance of the municipal TV station. Minor damages caused and no arrests made. The organization "Illegals' Convention/Ambassadors of Erebus" claimed responsibility for the attack. On June 03, an inflammable liquid set on fire two vehicles of the Hellenic Telecommunications Organization. Material damages were caused. The organization "Arsonists' Solidarity" claimed responsibility for the attack. On June 09, an improvised incendiary device exploded at the entrance of the Commercial Bank, causing minor damage. On June 10, a similar explosion occurred at the entrance of the Millenium Bank, causing minor damage. On June 25, unidentified people planted and set on fire four gas canisters at the entrance of a Citibank branch in the town of Kavala. The explosion and fire caused damage to the bank's

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equipment and furniture. On June 29, in the town of Xanthi, three containers of hydrochloric acid were thrown at a balcony, one floor below the local offices of New Democracy. Minor damage was caused. On June 30, two explosive devices exploded under two parked cars belonging to personnel of the Albanian Consulate General. The cars were partly damaged, but no injuries occurred.

ARRESTS FOR SMUGGLING OF WEAPONS, EXPLOSIVES AND NARCOTICS

¶6. (SBU) On June 13, police arrested in Thessaloniki two Greeks and a Bulgarian for heroin smuggling and dealing. Local media reported the three had recently sold 10 kilos of heroin in the area, while another 350 grams were found in their possession and confiscated. On June 19, police arrested a Romanian national at Thessaloniki's "Makedonia" airport, for trying to smuggle 4.5 kilos of heroin. According to the press, the culprit confessed to having bought the drug in Turkey and planning to sell it in the UK. On June 20, Greek police arrested four Bulgarians on the Greek-Bulgarian border, for trying to smuggle into the country three pistols, an AK47 and TNT. Police sources stressed there was no indication of a terrorist connection, but it is likely the arrested are members of a wider weapons smuggling ring. On June 30, customs officers arrested a Lithuanian national on the Greek-Turkish border carrying 7.5 kilos of heroin in his luggage.

CREDIT CARD FRAUD RING DISMANTLED IN THESSALONIKI

¶7. (SBU) On June 10, police in the Northern Greek areas of Thessaloniki and Halkidiki arrested 14 people (Macedonian, Bulgarian and a Greek) on charges of credit card fraud and confiscated hundreds of fraudulent cards in a home lab. Up to the time of their arrest, the group had managed to make withdrawals in excess of 500,000 by using skimming techniques. According to police sources, since 2007, Thessaloniki police have arrested a total of 44 people on credit card fraud charges,

making it one of the most successful European cities in fighting credit card fraud.

ENFORCING IPR: POLICE CONFISCATE PIRATED MUSIC AND MOVIE DISCS

18. (U) In three different cases, police in northern Greece arrested and fined six foreign nationals, four of them from Pakistan, for possessing a total of 1,473 pirated CDs and DVDs. The police confiscated the pirated material.

U.S CONSULATE GENERAL EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

19. (SBU) On June 01-04, the Consulate General, in co-operation with the U.S. Departments of Justice and Commerce and the SECI Center, organized a conference on trans-border cooperation and Cyber Crime in the northern Greek town of Drama. Participants included members of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary from Albanian, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. (Ref b)

-- From June 04-08, the amphibious assault vessel USS Bataan made the first official ship visit to the port of Thessaloniki in three years. Post organized a series of events for the occasion, including a well-attended reception, a media tour and a friendly basketball game between the crew and a local police team. Local reaction to the visit was enthusiastic. The press reported it factually. The Communist Party of Greece issued a statement "condemning" it.

-- On June 21, the Consulate General, in co-operation with the American Hellenic Educational and Progressive Association (AHEPA) Greece, held a ceremony to unveil the new bust of General James Van Fleet in the northwestern town of Kastoria. The bust was first dedicated in Kastoria in 1955 in memory of the General's contribution to the Greek Civil War. It was destroyed in 1986 as was its replacement, in 1999. The Consulate, AHEPA, local business people and the Van Fleet family have collaborated for the past three years to erect a new bust and build a small museum to house it, over the objections of a small group of leftists who have, until now, successfully intimidated Kastoria's municipal council from approving the required permits. Local left-leaning papers have criticized the initiative.

THRACE JOURNALIST PRAISES U.S. MULTI-ETHNIC MODEL FOLLOWING IV

10. (U) International Visitors program grantee and Thrace journalist and municipal councilor Damon Damianos praised America's success in creating a multi-ethnic society during an interview with the local press following his return from the United States, where he participated in the "Managing Diversity in a Multi-Ethnic Society" program. In the interview, he underlined his admiration for the advanced stage of civil

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society, the country's multicultural features and the high levels of religious tolerance. Mr. Damianos, an outspoken advocate of minority rights, said he would apply what he learned in the U.S. to his efforts to promote multi-ethnicity in Thrace.
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